

Rep. Peter Welch on Wednesday called on United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk to protect American dairy farmers in the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement.

Welch made the request during a Wednesday afternoon meeting he organized between Ambassador Kirk and the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus, of which he is co-chairman and founder.

On January 27, the Caucus wrote to Ambassador Kirk expressing concern that dairy prices in the United States would decline further with increased trade between the U.S. and New Zealand, where a single corporation dominates 92 percent of the nation's milk production and 40 percent of global dairy trade.

At Wednesday's meeting, Welch and other Caucus members urged Ambassador Kirk to seek an exemption for U.S.-New Zealand dairy trade in Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations.

"Vermont's dairy farmers and their families are again struggling with price fluctuations that threaten the very existence of our farms," Welch said. "If we are to ensure the U.S. dairy industry's survival, we must adopt trade policies that work for our farmers."